



blm - alaska

frontiers

managing public lands for multiple use

Issue 57 July/ August 1996

BLM celebrates its 50th Anniversary!

INSIDE

The Seward Meridian
—an imaginary but
critical line to south-
central Alaska

How you can stop
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Hobart Hyatt, a BLM cadastral survey retiree, stands next to the 1,600-pound, four-foot obelisk dedicated by BLM to pay tribute to the establishment of the Seward Meridian in 1911. The monument is located on Nash Road, about one half-mile west of the actual initial point of the Seward Meridian.



Cadastral survey redefines initial point

BLM-Alaska's cadastral survey cleans up an important Alaska landmark and adds a new monument besides

The origin of meridians

Airline passengers looking down as they fly across the western United States are usually impressed with the orderly rectangular fields—a result of the 1785 Land Ordinance passed by the Continental Congress which established a surveying plan to identify and describe land parcels.

The Continental Congress formed a committee to develop a surveying plan because of the unreliability of the old colonial narrative system of "metes and bounds." That system relied on geographical features like rocks, trees, and rivers whose permanence was affected by weather and other nature-made factors.

Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, chairman of the surveying committee, recommended a meridian (north-south) and baseline (east-west), and laying out townships from those coordinates. Each township possessed a different identification based on its distance and direction from the meridian and baseline.

The new rectangular system was established in 1785 and the survey of public domain lands commenced in 1786 in the Ohio Valley.

On July 16, 1996, in Seward, Alaska, the Bureau of Land Management celebrated the remonumentation of the Seward Meridian Initial Point along with BLM's 50th anniversary. This meridian, like 35 other principal meridians in the United States, links the navigational systems of longitude and latitude to the land we live on. The legal location of all land in southcentral Alaska is determined from the Seward Meridian.

On May 15, 1911, U.S. Surveyor John P. Walker and a survey crew set an iron post just west of Resurrection Bay establishing the Seward Principal Meridian and Seward Base Line. The intersection of these two lines is the initial point which serves as a reference of surveys of land within the meridian. It's also the point of reference for all 6,212 townships encompassed within the Seward Meridian (138 million acres in southcentral Alaska).

There are 36 base and meridian lines in the U.S.. The intersection of these two lines is the initial point of each survey area. The Seward Meridian is the largest of Alaska's five meridians, containing one-third of the state's 18,655 townships. Each township possesses a different identification based on its distance and direction from the meridian and baseline. Townships are numbered north or south of the base line. A column of townships is called a range, which numbers east or west of the principal meridian.

Retired surveyor Irving Zirpel explained why he thought the

principal point was located in Seward instead of the Susitna Valley north of Anchorage. "Seward was a deep water port. Anchorage was just a mudhole and a supply terminal for the railroad. Seward [also] had a lot more (mining) claims." BLM surveyor Larry Evans added, "I'm sure it was the local folks that convinced Mr. Walker to establish the meridian near Seward instead of the Susitna Valley."

During the summer of 1995, BLM surveyor Timothy A. Quincy rehabilitated the initial point which had become overgrown with vegetation. The celebration featured a granite monument which commemorates 50 years of BLM survey efforts in Alaska and across the nation.

The monument, site and event were a cooperative effort between the BLM, State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the Alaska Society of Professional Land Surveyors. The brief ceremony was attended by the mayors of Seward and the Kenai Borough, and BLM retirees and town residents. By proclamation, Governor Tony Knowles declared July 16, 1996, Seward Meridian Initial Point Day. A panel of speakers shared their thoughts and experiences about surveying in the rugged Alaska environment. Antique surveying equipment, and recent and historical photographs were also on display. All 90 people who attended received a commemorative paperweight which resembles a BLM brass monument cap.

Facts of the Fortymile

Advisory Council floats river for a first hand look

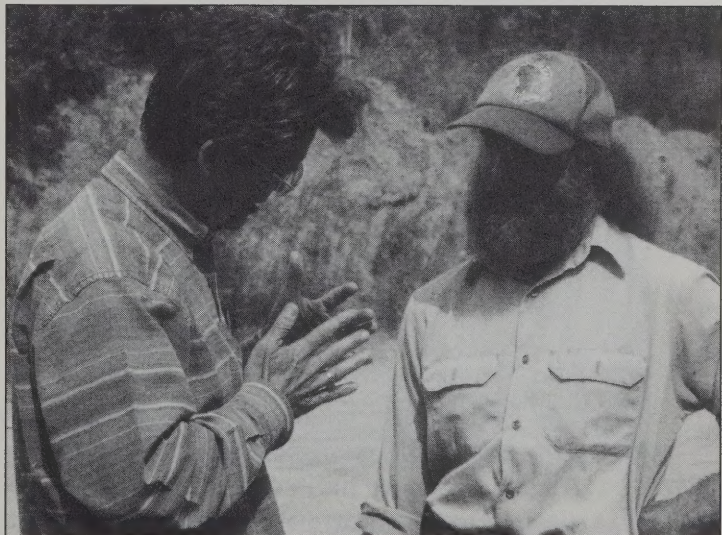
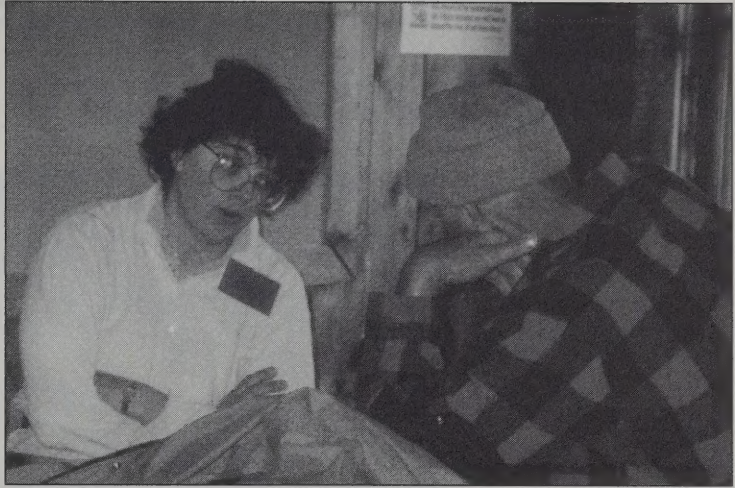
Fortymile country is big and beautiful. But that isn't what brought the Bureau of Land Management's Resource Advisory Council out to look at the area in late June. You see, a river runs through it. And what happens on that river is the subject of much controversy.

The Fortymile Wild and Scenic River has a rich mining history that many residents wish to see continue. It also has wild and scenic values that recreation and conservation groups feel could be compromised if suction dredging activities were permitted along the wild portion of the river. This difference in expectations makes for some pretty tough challenges for BLM resource managers. So the Council is examining these and other issues surrounding management policies for the Fortymile River.

To do this, four council members and BLM State Director Tom Allen visited the area in June to take a firsthand look at the river and its resources, and to meet with some of the people who use those resources. The trip began with an overflight of operations along the river. Next the group floated nine miles of the river to look at caterpillar and suction dredging mining activities. Later the council members met informally with miners and other users of the Fortymile at the Community Hall in Chicken. Some 50 people attended the meeting, 12 of whom addressed the council. A summary of these comments was provided to the full council following the trip.

The Resource Advisory Council will discuss these findings and offer possible recommendations to BLM at the next regular meeting September 12-13 at the Anchorage Federal Building. The public is welcome to attend the meeting and to participate in the public comment period from 1:30 to 3 p.m., Thursday, September 12.

—Teresa McPherson



Teresa McPherson

(Top) RAC Chair Joan Travostino talks with a member of the Fortymile Miners Association during a community meeting in Chicken. (Middle) RAC members stop to examine an historic mining dredge on the Fortymile River during a float trip down the river. (Bottom) State Director Tom Allen discusses mining issues with David Likens, a suction dredge operator on the Fortymile following the community meeting in Chicken.

50 years! BLM celebrates a half century in Alaska

BLMers, local officials and retired surveyors gathered in Seward on July 16 to rededicate Alaska's first initial point. BLM installed a 1,600-pound commemorative obelisk on Nash Road about a half-mile from the actual point. BLM will also install two colorful interpretive panels that describe the role of cadastral surveys in the settlement and development of Alaska.



Teresa McPherson

In Alaska, BLM's 50th Anniversary celebration kicked off in January with lapel pins and a calendar of important events in BLM history which was given to all employees and retirees. The calendars were also sent to schools throughout Alaska to inform them of BLM's history. About 250 teachers requested two other educational items also offered to schools: an Environmental Education Kit and a set of posters identifying key public land legislation.

Local BLM history has been roaming the electronic highway thanks to an e-mail time line of Alaskan events sent several times a month to all employees. Employees not only learned of historical milestones in BLM-Alaska but were invited to join in an electronic discussion about the events.

On the theatrical front, there have been four performances of *Bloomers to Briefcases*, a living history of the BLM done by Joyce Badgely-Hunsaker, a nationally-acclaimed actress from Oregon.

BLM retirees have been bringing a little

bit of history to current employees through a series of brown-bag lunches. Topics discussed included the history of the recreation program, the passage of the Alaska National Interest Land Claims Act (ANILCA) and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), and an overview of the wildlife program in Alaska. The lunch series will continue this fall.

The Anchorage District did their part to celebrate BLM's 50th anniversary with a time capsule which was buried near the flagpole at the Campbell Tract. Some of the capsule items included a 50th anniversary poster, banner and metal sign; a copy of the first ANCSA patent (1974) and first Native allotment certificate (1920), and a replica of a Mesa Site projectile.

Employees inventoried the capsule contents, more than 100 items, and placed them into double plastic bags. The items were grouped according to the type of material they were composed of to help reduce any possible chemical reactions that might occur between dissimilar (continued)

Anchorage Saturday Market draws crowds

The Bureau of Land Management brought its 50th anniversary celebration to the public on July 20, 1996, at the Anchorage Saturday Market where BLM was the guest of honor for Townsite Day. About 12,000 people attended.

A canvas wall tent held displays detailing the development of Anchorage starting with the first land auction there by BLM's predecessor, the General Land Office, in 1915. Other photos showed the changes in survey equipment from the turn of the century to today's state-of-the-art methods. BLM surveyors showed people how to use a solar transit and explained the survey program in Alaska. An oversized historical photo of surveyors was modified so that people could place their faces in the picture.

The highlight of the day was a one-woman living history drama performed by Joyce Badgley Hunsaker. She wrote and performed her presentation, *Bloomers to Briefcases*, telling the story of the settlement of the west and the development of the BLM through the voices of five different women. *Bloomers to Briefcases* is on tour at BLM 50th anniversary events nationwide all year.

BLM also showed off its new interpretive display titled *From Tents to Skyscrapers* which will be installed in a permanent location at the corner of the popular market. A new full-color display panel tells the story of the beginnings of Anchorage and replaces a small metal plaque that was installed during the 200th anniversary of cadastral surveys in 1985. The site is on the official Anchorage Walking Tour and overlooks the spot where the townsite lots were first auctioned more than 80 years ago.

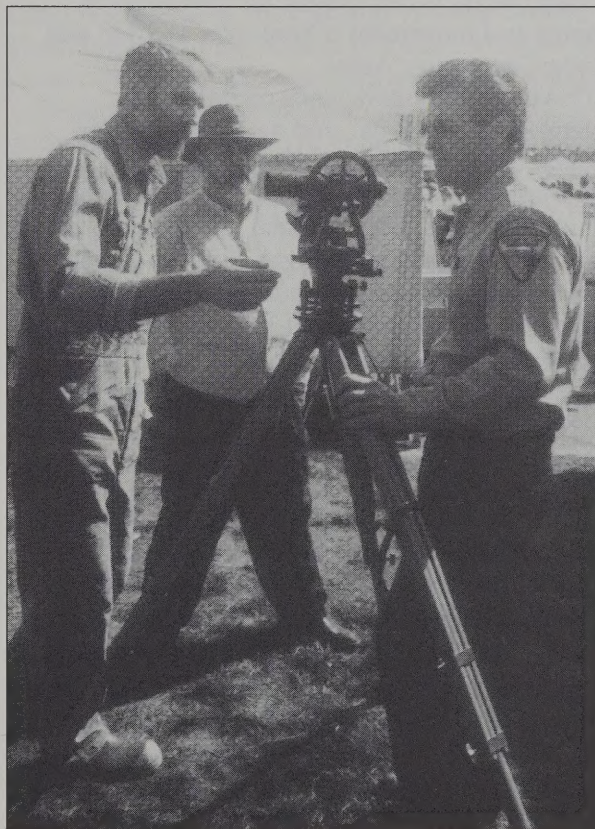
—Ed Bovy

materials over long periods of time inside the capsule.

The capsule, composed of plastic pipe, was buried near the flagpole using volcanic ash from the eruption of Mount Spurr in 1992. The location of the capsule is identified by a bronze plaque with raised lettering.

Bureau of Land Management employees put their thespian talents to use at a 50th anniversary gala performed at the Anchorage District and Alaska State Office. Numerous BLMers participated both on the stage and behind the scenes. The performances consisted of a poetry reading, puppet show and character sketches of various "infamous" BLM employees.

Bob Conquergood/Janet Malone



BLM's Mike Wilson and Mike Clark demonstrate a solar transit to BLM State Director Tom Allen. The survey demonstration at the Anchorage Saturday Market commemorated the agency's 50th anniversary and the original survey of the Anchorage townsite in 1915.

Managing fire before it becomes unmanageable

No single federal, state, local or tribal fire suppression organization is designed to handle an entire fire workload. Federal agencies maintain cooperative agreements with each other as well as with the Department of Defense and national, state and local entities to exchange protection responsibilities, information, training and support.

When a fire occurs, local people and equipment are used first to ensure quick response, minimize losses, and reduce costs. As local resources are exhausted, the local management agency requests assistance from its Geographic Area (regional) Coordination Center. When regional resources can no longer support fires within their geographic area, the Coordination Center turns to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) at Boise, Idaho, for help. NIFC is responsible for coordinating support and movement of resources to, from and among Geographic Areas.

This three-tier interagency coordination system—local, regional, and national—ensures efficient use of all fire suppression resources, regardless of agency affiliation. The local level includes BLM districts, national forests, national parks, fish and wildlife refuges, Bureau of Indian Affairs' agencies, and state and local agencies. The regional level consists of 11 interagency Geographic Coordination Centers across the United States, including Alaska. NIFC provides national support.

Sixty-five 20-person interagency Type I (hotshot) crews are available nationally to fight wildland fires. These crews are highly qualified to deal with complex firefighting situations. In addition, a total of 481 Type II crews are dispatched to fight fires wherever they are needed. And approximately 400 smokejumpers employed by the BLM and USDA Forest Service provide interagency initial-attack support throughout the West and Alaska.

All incident management teams and firefighting crews are trained in the Incident Command System. This system allows for the uniform deployment of resources and the use of common terminology, communications and fire suppression procedures.

When a wildland fire on public or private lands threatens to become a major disaster, the Federal Emergency Management Agency may provide a Fire Suppression Assistance Grant to the state to assist with suppression efforts.

Fire logistics in Alaska

Wildland fire suppression in Alaska is conducted on an interagency basis. The BLM Alaska Fire Service is responsible for fire management on all Department of Interior and Native corporation lands and on most military land. The State of Alaska is responsible for fire management on state, municipal and private lands. The U.S. Forest Service manages fire suppression in national forests.

Under an interagency agreement, AFS provides wildfire protection on all lands — 194 million acres — in the northern part of the state. The Alaska Division of Forestry fights fires on 150 million acres in the southern part.

AFS and the Division of Forestry jointly operate the Alaska Interagency Fire Coordination Center, which is located at AFS headquarters on Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks and coordinates fire suppression on all fires in the state. Resources are shared and moved freely between jurisdictions to where they are needed most.

During the Millers Reach fire, 50 miles north of Anchorage, in early June, the AIFCC coordinated the massive mobilization of firefighters, support personnel, equipment and supplies to the fire.

AIFCC responded to hundreds of requests for firefighting and support resources. In addition to Alaska resources, 19 hotshot crews, 530 overhead personnel, and 72 smokejumpers were brought up from the Lower 48. Thousands of pounds of firefighting supplies and equipment were shipped to Alaska via truck and cargo aircraft.

The Millers Reach fire was only one of five "project" fires burning in Alaska at that time. At the peak, at least 2,300 people were engaged in the fire suppression effort, including more than 60 Alaska emergency firefighter crews.

—Andy Williams

Fire-safe homes and defensible space

Home owners who spend the necessary time and energy to make their home "fire safe" will not only reduce the risk of wildfires destroying their home, but will also make it easier and safer for firefighters to protect their home in the event of a blaze. Home owners can do this by creating "defensible space." To reduce fire hazards:

- ▼ Clear leaves, brush and dry grass within 30 feet of houses and other structures. This will reduce the chance of a wildfire reaching the house and provide a safety zone or "defensible space" for firefighters to work in. Keep the area cleared throughout the fire season.
- ▼ Remove all trees within 10 feet of the house and space remaining trees at least 10 feet apart. Cut all branches to a height of 6 feet to prevent ground fires from spreading into tree tops.
- ▼ Clean the roof and rain gutters regularly, keeping them free of twigs, leaves and pine needles. Remove tree limbs within 10 feet of the chimney or stove pipe.
- ▼ Store firewood and other combustible materials, like picnic tables, at least 30 feet away from the house and other buildings. Also, clear a space of at least 10 feet around them.
- ▼ Post the house address along the road at the driveway entrance, as well as on the home. Numbers should be at least four inches high and mounted on high-contrast, non-combustible background material.
- ▼ Apply a fire-retarding solution, such as phosphate salt, to wood shingle and shake roofs. Re-treat the roof as directed.

Secretaries tell public how to foil fire

Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt recently urged people who live in or visit Western states this summer to help prevent wildfires during one of the most severe fire seasons in recent history. About 10,000 federal and state fire personnel have been fighting fires in six states.

"In the West, we are experiencing a particularly dry season that will require extensive efforts by the firefighting teams managed by the Interior and Agriculture departments," said Babbitt. "The number of wildfires that have occurred and the number of acres burned are far above what is normal."

Fire potential has been high in parts of eight states—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming—that face moderate to extreme drought conditions. Fire danger in the other Western states has been moderate to low.

Five federal agencies—the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs—fight wildfires in cooperation with state agencies and local fire departments.

Federal agencies took a number of steps earlier this spring to address areas with high fire potential, including activating firefighters earlier than normal; contracting air tankers to provide close initial attack support in places where homes and other structures are located in undeveloped areas; and strategically positioning infrared scanning aircraft.

Babbitt and Glickman urged homeowners to help protect their houses by taking steps to make them fire-safe and to create defensible space for firefighters. "Although wildland firefighters are not trained or equipped to fight structural fires, they often protect homes from advancing wildfires," said Babbitt. "That is a difficult task in the best of circumstances, but is often made impossible due to the large amounts of natural overvegetation that surround homes and structures."

"Last month I visited the Buffalo Creek fire, just outside Denver," said Glickman. "I met a woman who had lost her home and nearly all of her possessions in the fire. ... With more and more people building homes near, to, and within the woods, incidences of fire threatening homes will continue to increase."

Babbitt added; "One of the reasons we've experienced such severe fire seasons in recent years is that for most of the last century we have not allowed fire to play its natural role in the environment." Earlier this spring, Babbitt and Glickman endorsed a new federal wildland fire management policy emphasizing the reduction of fuel (vegetation) accumulation through prescribed fires that require specific, pre-determined conditions. Prescribed fires may be ignited by resource managers or by natural events such as lightning.

"With the new emphasis on ecosystem management as a basis for guiding public land decisions, fire is being better recognized as an important management tool," Glickman said.

Mining claimants must file a new Notice of Occupancy form on or before October 15, 1996.

The form is part of new regulations, published in the July 16 *Federal Register*. It gives BLM the ability to eliminate the use of unpatented mining claims for purposes other than legitimate mining, such as recreational cabins, homesites, or hunting and fishing camps.

"This new rule is directed at squatters, whose abuses of mining claims have hurt the reputation of legitimate miners on public lands," said BLM Acting Director Mike Dombeck.

BLM will visit sites during the normal course of inspections of mining operations. Claimants' use and occupancy must relate to prospecting or exploration, mining or processing operations, or other land uses that are reasonably related to such activities. Individuals who are not complying with the new regulations will have a year's grace period to come into compliance—but only if they have filed

their Notice on time.

Occupancy means living on the site for more than 14 days in any 90-day period and includes permanent structures as well as motor homes and trailers. Tents and lean-tos are exempt from the law and do not have to be reported, but BLM can require their removal if they are not reasonably incident to bona fide mining activities.

The Notice of Occupancy Form and a complete copy of the regulations are available at BLM offices throughout the state.



The Federal Subsistence board extended federal subsistence caribou seasons in Unit 13 to help control the growth of the Nelchina Caribou Herd, which has grown to an extent that it is in danger of damaging its habitat through overgrazing. The State of Alaska has also expanded general hunting seasons in this unit.

There are very few federal public lands in Unit 13. These lands include Bureau of Land Management lands in the Glennallen District, which lie in narrow strips along the Richardson Highway, and several Wild and Scenic River Corridors; and portions of Denali National Park and Wrangell-St. Elias National Preserve. Hunting within the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline right-of-way is prohibited.

Federal permits may be obtained from the Bureau of Land Management office in Glennallen, Denali National Park and Preserve office at Denali Park (for hunting in the park only), and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve offices at Copper Center or Slana (for hunting in the reserve only).

Federally qualified rural residents may harvest two caribou, by federal registration permit on federal public lands during this season.



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Editor/writer/design: Janet S. Malone

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BLM-AK-GI-96-005-1120-912

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